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ABSTRACT

This guide assists in planning and monitoring the vocational education programs of students with mild disabilities. The pamphlet emphasizes the importance of vocational education for disabled students and reviews the three stages of career development: career awareness/orientation, career exploration, and career preparation. A section on adapting vocational programs and curricula is accompanied by a table listing typical vocational education program offerings. Also discussed are vocational assessment, the Individualized Education Program, and meeting individual needs. The guide concludes with a discussion of planning for the transition from school to work. (JDD)

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A Parent's Guide to Vocational Education

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News Digest
Information from the National Information Center for Handicapped Children and Youth
1987 NUMBER 8

Young people with disabilities and their parents are both troubled and excited about the young person leaving school and entering the work place. Uncertainty about opportunities in today's job market often makes it difficult to determine what kind of career to prepare for, as well as how much and what type of education to pursue. Development of computers, robots, and other forms of technology is rapidly changing jobs in all sectors of our society. On the other hand, it is exciting for both parents and young people to think about pursuing careers and the new experiences that lie ahead. Advances in technology have expanded the potential for young people with disabilities to be productively employed in offices, factories, and their homes. For instance, the recent introduction of voice activation units for computers has enabled persons with severe physical disabilities to use their word processing and writing programs at a rate three or four times faster than the conventional keyboards. Jobs in many fields are rapidly becoming much more accessible to individuals with all types of disabilities. In addition, employers are beginning to change their attitudes towards individuals with limitations. Many firms recognize that restructuring job assignments to accommodate a person's disability is financially rewarding on a long-term basis for both the firm and the individual.

This guide is written to assist parents in planning and monitoring their child's vocational education program. It outlines the key aspects of career development that are associated with vocational education, and describes the elements of a high-quality vocational education program. We have outlined the important roles and questions for parents to address in working collaboratively with professionals to provide meaningful, appropriate vocational education plans. Our primary focus in this paper will be on general considerations and specific strategies for providing vocational education to students with mild disabilities.

The Importance of Vocational Education for Students with Disabilities

While the road from school to employment is often "bumpy" for young people between the ages of 16 and 22, it has proven particularly difficult for those with disabilities. It is imperative for parents, teachers, and other professionals to work closely in the process of planning high school courses, vocational education programs, and job training experience to ensure that young people with disabilities are well prepared to enter the workforce or to pursue further education. There are a number of factors that affect a young person's ability to find work, including the general economic climate, the number of people looking for work, and the attractiveness of the community for "new business", but holding a marketable skill is the key factor.

Over the past five years several states have begun to conduct follow-up studies of special education students leaving high school. These studies confirm the view that a large percentage of former students have a very difficult time obtaining and holding a job. In Vermont, for example, where the 426 students with mild disabilities who left or completed school between 1979 and 1983 were studied, only 55 percent were employed. Of those employed, about one-third worked only on a part-time basis. Those students who are employed tend to hold relatively low-paying jobs, often earning wages considerably below their non-disabled peers. Similar employment and earnings data have been reported for young people with mild disabilities who had either dropped out or completed high school in Colorado, Florida, Virginia, and Washington. For those former students who became employed, the crucial factors appeared to be a strong family-friend network, part-time and summer work in high school, com-

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pletion of high school, and attainment of academic skills in reading and mathematics. Most of the studies found that former students who were employed had participated in special education-supervised work experience programs (focused on developing general employment skills, such as good work habits, communication skills, and job search skills). In most instances, former students had not completed extensive vocational education courses or programs.

Studies of selected vocational technical education programs reveal a high degree of success in developing the employment potential of young people with disabilities. For example, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) provides technical training in 14 different programs for over 1,000 students each year. Ninety percent of the NTID's students find employment following graduation. While it will not be possible to duplicate NTID's facilities and support services in every community, NTID's success clearly shows the benefits that are possible if we choose to invest the resources.

Young people with disabilities benefit from vocational education programs in a number of ways. At the junior and senior high school levels, vocational programs provide opportunities for students to explore a range of career fields, develop entry level job skills, and decide upon the career field they may wish to pursue through further education. Through participation in these programs young people become aware of the need to develop good work habits, build self-discipline, and acquire basic communication, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. The programs of high quality have technically up-to-date equipment, curriculums, and teachers who work closely with local business and technical advisory groups. High quality programs also provide opportunities for students to gain firsthand knowledge about work in a particular field through job shadowing experiences and, later in the program, supervised, part-time work experience which emphasizes on-the-job learning.
Programs that have these qualities are not preparing young people for narrow, dead-end jobs. Instead, they offer opportunities to explore and prepare for a variety of career fields.

The Center for Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education recently reported that nearly 93 percent of high school students take at least one vocational education course during high school. The typical high school student takes 3-4 units of credit in vocational education during a 20-unit program. Clearly, vocational education is not, as the common expression goes, "for someone else's kid." Generally, students with mild disabilities, who usually complete a few additional high school credits, have the opportunity to enroll in more vocational education courses than most students. The provisions of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 require school districts to provide students with disabilities with many more services than in the past, including vocational assessment, special services, counseling and career development planning, and services to facilitate the transition from vocational education to employment or further training.

Vocational education programs are offered in a variety of occupational areas such as agriculture, marketing, health occupations, home economics (including consumer and occupationally related courses such as child care and food service), industrial arts, business education, technical education, and trade and industrial education. (See Table 1.) As noted earlier, high quality programs in each of these areas reflect local and regional trends in employment. They offer training opportunities that lead to employment in fields such as accounting, horticulture, dental hygiene, carpentry, advertising, and aviation. High quality programs also provide training in emerging occupations (e.g. environmental control technology, solar energy, fiber optics and word processing). In 1981-82 approximately 16.8 million young people and adults participated in vocational education programs throughout the United States. The programs with the largest enrollments are business education (about 22 percent), trade and industrial occupations (19 percent) and consumer and homemaking education (18 percent). About 40 percent of the individuals were enrolled in vocational programs in community colleges and other postsecondary institutions.

Early Stages of Career Development

Career development involves the continuous accumulation of work-related behaviors and skills both before and after entry into an occupation. The process goes on from infancy to adulthood. A person will repeat certain portions of the process when he or she decides to change jobs or careers later in life.

Career preparation is not limited to specific vocational preparation. The term "career" includes the roles the individual plays as a student, worker, consumer, family member, and participant in leisure and recreational activities. Each of these aspects of a

person's "career" interact and affect the success of an individual in finding and maintaining employment. In view of this broad definition of career development, it is clear that the process begins during the earliest years of a person's life. Even before the child starts school, parents of children with disabilities can help their child develop social skills that are an important part of career development. It is crucial for the parents to nurture a sense of self-worth and confidence in their children. If appropriate social skills are not taught in the child's early years, valuable time will have to be taken from acquiring vocational skills during the adolescent and young adult years.

Parents can also help in the early stages of career development by recording their observations about the physical and intellectual abilities and limitations of their children from early childhood. These observations can provide the basis for planning for short- and long-term goals in all aspects of the child's development. A record of such observations and experience in planning will make it easier to set goals for vocational education when the time comes.

Career development can be thought of as a three-stage process. The first stage, *Career awareness/ Orientation*, should familiarize the students with all types of careers while promoting an awareness of themselves in relation to different career options. This stage typically begins in the late elementary years and early junior high school. Both in school and at home, teachers and parents need to stress: the importance of work, the broad range of work and employment opportunities available, the relationship among different types of work (e.g. job ladders within a company, how workers in professions employ support staff in other occupations), and the personal and economic benefits derived from different types of work. Parents and other relatives can assist with the process of increasing career awareness by telling the young person about their own jobs; by describing what is involved in various occupations in the community; by using local newspapers, magazines, televi-

TABLE 1
TYPICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Agriculture:	Agricultural production, supplies and services, mechanics, products, horticulture, renewable natural resources, forestry, fishing, and fisheries.
Distributive Education:	Advertising, apparel and accessories, automotive, finance and credit, forestry, food distribution, food services, general merchandise, hardware and building material, home furnishings, hotel and lodging, industrial marketing, insurance, personal services, real estate, recreation and tourism, and transportation.
Health:	Dental assisting, dental hygiene, dental laboratory technology, medical laboratory assisting, nursing, practical nursing, nursing assistance, rehabilitation, radiologic technology, mental health technology, inhalation therapy, medical assistant, community health aide, and medical emergency technician.
Consumer and Homemaking:	Home economics.
Consumer and Homemaking: (Occupational):	Care and guidance of children, clothing management, food management, home furnishing, and institutional and home management.
Industrial Arts:	Woodshop, metalshop, and mechanical drawing.
Business and Office:	Accounting and computing occupations, computer and console operators, programmers, filling and office machines, personnel and training, stenographic and secretarial, supervisory and administrative management, and typing.
Technical:	Architectural technology, automotive technology, civil technology, electrical technology, environmental-control technology, industrial technology, mechanical technology, scientific data processing, commercial pilot training, fire and fire safety technology, and waste and waste water technology.
Trade and Industrial:	Air conditioning, appliance repair, body and fender repair, auto mechanics, automotive specialization, aviation occupations, commercial arts, commercial photography, carpentry, electricity, masonry, plumbing and pipefitting, custodial services, diesel mechanics, drafting, foremanship, graphic arts, instrument maintenance and repair, maritime occupation, machine shop, machine tools, sheet metal welding and cutting, tool and die making, metallurgy, cosmetology, plastics, fireman training, law enforcement training, refrigeration, small engine repair, stationary energy sources, textile production and fabrication, upholstering, and woodworking.

Source: Hoachlender, E.G., Choy, S.P. & Laureu, A.P. (September, 1985), *From Prescriptive to Permissive Planning: New Directions for Vocational Education Policy*. Berkeley, CA: MPR Associates, Inc.

Parents are their child's greatest advocates. They must see to it that career development goals are included in the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for their children throughout their years in school and that curriculums include career concepts.

sion, and movies to stimulate discussion of a variety of careers; and by encouraging children to explore hobbies which use skills and tools related to occupational interests.

The second stage, *Career Exploration*, occurs during the later junior high school years and during the initial years of high school. During this stage students must have the opportunity to learn by doing through "hands-on" activities. That is, they should enroll in introductory vocational courses to become more familiar with the general nature of work in such fields as business, industry, agriculture, health, etc.. In addition, these courses give students opportunities to work on practical projects, test their manipulative skills, begin to apply their general education (e.g. math, English, and science) and meet individuals who work in the fields through field trips and guest lectures. Parents can also help their children informally explore careers. Newspaper routes, 4-H projects, volunteer work, and church or service club projects all offer opportunities to explore different types of work. Parents need to involve their children with disabilities in these types of activities. They should also provide additional information and guidance to ensure that their child understands the importance of exploratory experiences and the relationship of such experiences to decisions about the future. A number of high schools and some junior high schools will offer special work experience/career exploration programs for students who are 14 to 16 years of age. Many of these programs are set up specifically for students with disabilities or disadvantaged children. These programs also provide valuable exploratory experiences if they are well planned and give students opportunities to be involved in several different types of work.

The third stage, *Career Preparation*, begins when students have made a preliminary choice and are ready to prepare for entering work in a certain field or occupation. For many students this stage may begin in the later years of high school, while for others it doesn't begin until they enter postsecondary education. Vocational education becomes extremely important at this stage for students entering careers not requiring a college degree. In this stage of career development students begin to develop and/or integrate the personal, social, and job-related skills they will need when they enter the workforce, or to pursue further training at a community college or technical institute. They begin to make plans for the future based on their abilities, needs, and employment prospects.

In addition to providing in-school vocational instruction, high quality programs provide work experience opportunities, career guidance, training in job interviewing and job seeking skills, information on additional educational opportunities and opportunities for leadership development through vocationally oriented student clubs. (See Table 1 for information on the full range of vocational programs that are available.) Special services that allow students with disabilities to benefit from programs are offered in high schools, area vocational centers, community colleges, and two-year postsecondary institutes.

Additional stages of the career development process can include job placement, work adjustment and, in some cases, continuing education. These additional stages are often required to ensure that students with disabilities obtain employment equal to their abilities and consistent with their personal interests. In some communities these services are provided through vocational education programs, while in other communities they are provided by rehabilitation agencies or organizations such as the Association for Retarded Citizens. Readers interested in obtaining information about aspects of career development related to successful adjustment for working and living independently can obtain copies of the March, 1986 *Transition Summary* (Making Sure a House is Still a Home), the December, 1985 *Transition Summary* (Community-Wide Transition Planning), and *News Digest #5* (Least Restrictive Environment-Knowing One When You See It) from the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013.

The appropriate time for initiating each of the career development stages for young people with disabilities depends more upon their developmental level than their grade level. Students attending regular schools are likely to participate in career development activities in much the same way and at the same ages as their non-disabled peers. However, parents and educators must pay close attention to ensuring that young people with disabilities derive maximum benefit from career development activities.

Parents are their child's greatest advocates. They must see to it that career development goals are included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for their children throughout their years in school and that curriculums include career concepts. Parents can reinforce the career development activities taking place in school by using real-life experiences to convey the importance of different

aspects of career awareness, career exploration, and career preparation. Parents can stress objectives such as punctuality, responsibility, and task sharing in the youth's day-to-day activities. They can assist students in understanding and using vocabulary appropriately, using correct social skills, and a number of other practical skills. As in all aspects of the youth's education, the key to success is cooperation between the parent, the school system, and the student.

The inability to participate in career awareness and exploration activities should not prevent students with disabilities from benefiting from vocational education programs. While not true in all cases, many career preparation programs are sufficiently flexible to allow students to be admitted at various levels of awareness and skill development. This can be done when the students are provided with appropriate support services. Many specialized vocational training programs for students with severe disabilities have documented that persons with profound mental retardation can receive intensive vocational training without awareness and exploratory activities and become successfully employed as a result. As noted earlier, it is not uncommon for young people to repeat these phases two or three times before they discover a career or occupation which will provide them with a satisfying and productive niche in the world of work. Like other young people, the employment success of young people with disabilities is dependent on personal factors such as decisions to get married, have children, and personality clashes with co-workers. Success is also influenced by economic developments including increased automation and intensified international business competition which schools and parents have little or no control over.

Vocational Assessment

Vocational assessment is a systematic, ongoing process designed to help students and their parents understand the young person's vocational potential. It measures abilities, interests, and aptitudes and helps to identify appropriate work environments for the young person.

Vocational assessment has become an integral part of planning for students with disabilities during the secondary school years. The Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984 , which authorizes federal funds to support vocational education programs, specifically lists assessment as a service to be considered when planning vocational programming for special needs students. Special needs students include those who are disabled, disadvantaged, or have limited English proficiency. Section 204(c) of the Act requires that special needs students enrolled in vocational education receive an assessment of their interests, abilities, and special needs relative to successful completion of the program. As students progress through the various stages of career development, they should be reevaluated frequently by counselors and teachers using, as appropriate, both standardized and teacher-developed measures. As students become interested in and able to make specific career choices, the assessment process will become increasingly comprehensive—examining the match between specific aspects of jobs and the individual.

Parents should take an active role in all aspects of the vocational assessment process. They should ask professionals to perform assessment as part of planning the child's total educational program. The results of vocational assessments can be used to improve the quality and completeness of the student's IEP.

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Comprehensive vocational assessment should be undertaken prior to the student enrolling in vocational education. The process should include measures to determine vocational interests, aptitudes, achievement, and potential. A variety of assessment procedures have been developed to measure the student's level of performance in relation to selected careers and occupations such as work samples, on-the-job observation, simulated work stations, manual dexterity tests, career interest inventories, and paper and pencil aptitude tests (Linn & Destefano, 1986).

Vocational interests are usually determined through the use of career interest inventories and interviews with students, parents, and previous teachers. Prior experiences, hobbies, and career exploration activities are helpful in developing an assessment of student interest in one or more career fields.

Vocational aptitudes (such as manual dexterity, eye/hand coordination, fine motor skills, general intelligence, etc.) need to be examined to blend a student's career interest and his or her vocational strengths and limitations. Assessment of aptitudes is an important ingredient in making realistic and appropriate placements.

The results of vocational achievement tests describe the skills the student possesses and provide guidance for the selection of appropriate courses and programs.

A comprehensive vocational assessment should culminate in a written report and a meeting attended

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by parents, the student, and appropriate school personnel. This meeting may be held separately or as part of the IEP meeting where the IEP is developed, approved, or reviewed and after which placement or change of placement may be addressed. At such meetings, parents should feel comfortable in asking questions, requesting that technical terms used in the report be explained, and expressing their ideas about the young person's needs. Arriving early at the meeting will give parents an opportunity to look at the assessment materials and talk informally with assessment personnel.

Vocational Education and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Public Law 94-142, The Education of the Handicapped Act, requires that a multidisciplinary team develop written goals appropriate to the educational needs of each student. The IEP ensures that students with disabilities (in all school programs including vocational programs) receive service based on their unique educational needs. The goals set in the IEP should originate from valid and reliable assessment data which has been carefully gathered. The IEP must synthesize input from parents, students, vocational and special educators, and counselors, and from appropriate support personnel (e.g. speech clinician, occupational therapist, and staff of appropriate outside agencies including the vocational rehabilitation agency).

According to the law, the IEP should include: a statement of the young person's present level of performance, annual goals and short-term instructional objectives, a description of the special education and related services being provided, dates for delivery of these services, and appropriate criteria and procedures for evaluating achievement of the objectives.

The team needs to identify information on the following points as a means of determining the student's present level of vocational performance:

1. Student's stated vocational goal;
2. Expectations of parents regarding the student's vocational preparation;
3. Results of vocational interest and aptitude assessments;
4. Results of work samples (can include both commercially produced samples as well as those prepared by and for local programs);
5. Results of exploratory experiences in vocationally oriented programs;
6. Descriptions and evaluations of previous work experiences;
7. The student's physical and mental capacity for work;
8. The student's employment related behaviors (e.g. attendance, social and interpersonal skills, attention span, communication skills, personal hygiene, dependability, and productivity).

To make the best possible match between program and students, vocational instructors need to provide the following information about their courses and the related occupations:

1. Course objectives and curriculum requirements;
2. Safety requirements;
3. Prerequisite skills;
4. Modifications necessary to make classrooms, shop and worksites accessible;
5. Alternative instructional materials;
6. Staff/student ratio;
7. Methods for evaluating and grading student performance;
8. Opportunities for work experience;
9. Employment outlook for persons trained in the specific skill both locally and nationally;
10. Local availability of jobs.

By matching the information about the student with information about the vocational program, the IEP team will be better able to make appropriate placement decisions.

The annual goal statement in the IEP should be global in nature and describe the entire range of the student's vocational education experience. The short-term instructional objectives should describe the sequence of activities which will be used to reach the annual goal. In many cases, the objectives can be simply taken from the vocational instructor's sequenced curriculum. The procedure for measuring a student's progress must also be included.

Based on the student's level of performance, the annual goals may focus on a specific vocational program. Typical vocational educational programming involves a set of sequential courses, usually in the 11th and 12th grade. Many comprehensive high schools and vocational centers have previously offered courses designed specifically for students with disabilities. However, mainstreaming requirements have prompted schools to limit the number of special vocational education classes offered.

Vocational education and training in integrated settings provides students with opportunities to learn appropriate ways of interacting with others in school and work settings.

As a means of encouraging greater use of integrated programs, Congress limited the expenditure of funds for services to special populations under the Carl Perkins Act to support services, rather than vocational courses designed solely for students with disabilities.

If the IEP is to become a working document and not merely an empty exercise, parents and the young person must view themselves as equal partners with professionals in the process of developing the document and monitoring the young person's program.

Parents can offer information that no other source can. They have had a unique opportunity to witness their young person's development since infancy and to observe him or her in a greater variety of situations than any professional. Educators can gain added insight into the young person's vocational interests and aptitudes through discussions with the parents. Parents also can contribute to implementing the IEP by helping to make program selections, assisting young people to develop good social skills, and encouraging them to accept responsibility for their own actions.

It is also of great importance to involve the student in the decisions about his or her vocational program. Until recently, little attention has been given to the role young people themselves must play in the planning process. And yet, involving young people in making decisions about their own lives is extremely important. If young people feel that they have had a say in making plans for their future, they are more likely to feel a strong commitment to making those plans work.

Adapting Vocational Programs and Curricula

As noted in Table 1, vocational education includes a wide array of programs and opportunities. Vocational programs of high quality offer a number of experiences in addition to courses preparing students for employment in a certain field. Various types of work experiences are frequently offered in cooperation with local businesses. Many programs also include youth organizations such as the Future Homemakers of America (FHA) and the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), which provide important opportunities for students to develop leadership and public speaking skills.

Since vocational education programs are offered in a variety of settings in addition to middle schools, junior high schools and high schools, parents should obtain information on all the vocational programs in their community. It may be the case that vocational programs offered in vocational centers, community colleges, and two-year postsecondary institutes may be more appropriate to the needs of a particular student.

In thinking about a student's vocational education program, parents should be aware that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that students with disabilities not be denied access to vocational programs because of their need for aids or because of architectural barriers. Information on the application of Section 504 to Department of Education programs can be obtained from the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps (NICHCY), P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013.

Regular, mainstream programs usually include both classroom and lab instruction focusing on an occupational area (e.g. business) or a specific occupation (e.g. clerical). Mainstream programs offer the student with disabilities the advantage of regular interaction with nondisabled students. Such programs more closely resemble the social setting that students with disabilities will encounter when they leave school and go to work.

It is important for parents to be sure that placement in a regular program with appropriate support services is thoroughly examined before consenting to a special or separate vocational education program placement.

Most modifications are based on common sense and involve using safety or teaching practices that benefit all students.

Meeting Individual Needs

As stated earlier, educators have a legal obligation to make necessary modifications to accommodate the needs of individual students with disabilities. Most modifications are based on common sense and involve using safety or teaching practices that benefit all students. The use of curriculum modifications, specific instructional strategies, and adaptations of equipment or facilities are the most common forms of modifications. Excessive concerns on the part of educators and parents can be alleviated by a review of the findings of Dupont's study which found that workers with disabilities have a better than average work and safety record (E.I. Du Pont, 1982).

When considering any modification for a student with a disability, the IEP team needs to keep in mind the implications of the modification for the student's performance in future work environments. Accommodations made for workers with disabilities in business and industry

Regardless of the level of transition services required, the process cannot be successful unless families and agencies begin working together to systematically plan for it.

are usually quite simple, inexpensive, unique to each individual, and often identified or suggested by a co-worker. Common examples of modifications include braille manuals, talking terminals, sign language courses, and sensory devices. Recent breakthroughs in rehabilitation engineering will increasingly benefit students with severe disabilities. The improved design and use of artificial limbs, communication devices, orthopedic braces, and mobility aids will assist in the integration process for these students.

It is vital for educators to help students with disabilities to develop an awareness of the current technology available for making accommodations. The ultimate goal should be that students are able to independently advocate for any necessary modifications in whatever environment they find themselves. To this end, independent functioning, decision making, and self advocacy can be included in the IEP as appropriate. It is also important to discontinue any special modifications or instructional assistance when students no longer need them.

Specific modifications used to facilitate placement in regular vocational programs will depend on a careful analysis of the individual's needs and the vocational program. A sample of commonly used techniques includes the following:

1. Structured orientation period (which would include parents in an initial visit);
2. Peer tutoring;
3. Vocational resource teachers;
4. Small group instruction;
5. Readers/interpreters;
6. Specialized instructional materials;
7. Use of task analysis (breaking down skills to be learned in small parts);
8. Large print materials;
9. Sound or light signals on equipment;
10. Counseling;
11. Adaptation of teaching techniques to the student's learning style;
12. Cooperative instructional agreements between vocational and special educators.

Making necessary modifications is often easier than overcoming negative attitudes and misconceptions about students with disabilities. Parental advocacy and careful planning of the student's entrance into a regular vocational program are essential elements in combating such difficulties. Maintaining appropriate support services for students will do much to overcome attitudinal barriers.

The Transition to Work

The goal of vocational education is to help students achieve sustained, competitive employment. Students with disabilities require different types of services to reach this goal. As noted above, careful, collaborative planning is the key to a successful transition from school to work.

Some students with disabilities will need no special services in locating employment or further education and training beyond those regularly available to other students (career guidance and counseling, exposure to information on postsecondary education opportunities, and minimal job search assistance). Like their non-disabled peers, these students will probably be able to find their own employment and educational opportunities through the family-friend-community network. If they have been in vocational education programs, they may be placed in jobs upon graduation or be recruited by employers who view vocational programs as training grounds for potential employees.

Other students will require additional, special services in their efforts to seek employment. Depending upon the community, these services might be provided by the state's Vocational Rehabilitation agency, programs and services funded through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), or other educational organizations such as community colleges, adult education centers, or postsecondary vocational institutes.

State Vocational Rehabilitation agency offices are located in large and mid-sized cities and provide services such as vocational evaluation, counseling, referral, tuition assistance for vocational and other training programs, placement services, and follow-up. Vocational rehabilitation agencies also provide or purchase such aids as artificial limbs, hearing aids, or wheelchairs that are essential for employment.

The federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provides funds for employment training programs throughout the country. Projects funded through the Act provide on-the-job training, classroom vocational training, work experience, basic education, and summer employment programs. In most states, young people and adults with disabilities, regardless of their family income, receive special consideration when they apply for JTPA programs and services.

Most community colleges offer extensive support services for students with disabilities including interpreter services, learning resources centers, and other special services.

Young people with severe and profound disabilities may require ongoing employment-related support services. Over the past several years new employment options have been developed for this population. In-

novative programs to develop supported employment and enclaves in industry are receiving extensive national attention. Supported work has been defined by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) as:

> Paid work in a variety of integrated settings, particularly regular work sites, especially designed for severely handicapped individuals, irrespective of age or vocational potential–
> (1) for whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage has not traditionally occurred; and
> (2) who, because of their disability, need intensive ongoing post-employment support to perform in a work setting.

Transition Planning

Regardless of the level of transition services required, the process cannot be successful unless families and agencies begin working together to systematically plan for it. Ideally, when a student reaches the age of 16, an individualized transition plan (ITP) should be developed or added to the student's IEP. In some communities, the ITP is being initiated during the junior high years.

Transitional planning will vary with the needs of the individual and the range of local community resources and employment options. The cooperative involvement of a number of individuals is essential to the development of the ITP. The following individuals should be involved:

- Special educators
- Vocational educators
- Vocational rehabilitation counselors
- Special education administrator
- Parents
- Student
- Employer (when appropriate).

A case manager from the public or private agency (such as the developmental disabilities agency) who has worked or will be working with the student and his family should also be involved (when appropriate).

Planning the steps for transition to postsecondary options requires active informed participation by parents and students. While the roles of school and support agencies change at the time of transition, parents remain a source of assistance throughout the life of the student. Parents and students must learn about the general transition process used in their communities, the options and services available, and prepare for active involvement in meetings related to the ITP.

Legislative mandates and regulations alone cannot bring about meaningful employment and independence for persons with disabilities. Supportive, involved, and informed families who advocate early for appropriate career and vocational opportunities for their sons and daughters, and young people who understand their role in planning for their transition are the best insurance that employment opportunities will exist and the full potential of students with disabilities will be realized.

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Parent-Employer Conference Proceedings

A Conference on Parent-Employer Partnerships: Developing Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities was held March 16-17, 1987 in Alexandria, Virginia. The conference brought together parents and employers to identify practical strategies that might help youth with disabilities succeed in the transition to the world of work.

Sponsors of the conference were the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, and the National Council on the Handicapped. Key objectives were to present employment issues for young people and adults with special needs; to develop strategies and guidelines for parents and employers to use in assisting youth with special needs seeking employment; and to produce a guide for replicating this kind of parent-employer conference in other parts of the country.

The conference marked an important phase in the enhancement of working relationships between parents, employers, national, state and local governments, and organizations devoted to improving the lives of young people and adults with special needs in securing employment in the competitive market place.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps (NICHCY) compiled and published a proceedings document entitled "Parent-Employer Partnerships: Developing Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities." This 36-page summary document includes guidelines and resources to assist local groups replicate the conference specific to the needs of both young people with disabilities and employers in their local communities. For information about obtaining single copies of this document, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013.

Additional Notes:

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